

THE BEE,

OR

LITERARY WEEKLY INTELLIGENCER,

CONSISTING OF

ORIGINAL PIECES,

and

SELECTIONS FROM PERFORMANCES OF MERIT,
FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC,

A Work calculated to disseminate useful Knowledge among all ranks
of people at a small expence.

BY

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Hor.³



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Disquisition on the connection that subsists between Rent, and the price of Grain, and their mutual influence upon each other *.

IN compliance with the request of a farmer, vol. iv. p. 69, and some other respectable correspondents, I now sit down to enquire into the effect of *rent* on the *price of grain*; and the manner in which these two particulars, reciprocally influence each other: A subject of no incurious discussion, that has not been hitherto fully elucidated.

Grain can in no case be raised, without a certain degree of labour and expence, the price of which must

* This piece has been delayed longer than was intended, from accidental circumstances.

be repaid to the grower, otherwise he cannot afford to produce it. This may be said, in the strictest sense, to constitute *its intrinsic* price.

Money being accounted the common measure of value, this price will be affected by the quantity of money that can be obtained for labour, in general, in that place at the time. The farmer must give those he employs, wages in proportion to what they can get in other employments ; so that if these wages are high, the farmers charge must be high also. And the *intrinsic* price of his corn must rise, as the rate of this expence is augmented.

Thus, do we perceive, that there must ever be a necessary connection between the price of grain, and the prosperity of manufacturers, and the degree of emolument to be derived from them ; so that any attempt to distress the one, at the expence of the other, is contrary to nature, violent in its operation, and must be transitory in its effects.

The intrinsic price of grain, however, all other circumstances being alike, must vary with the fertility of the soil on which it is produced. On a rich soil, less labour, and less seed will produce a given quantity of grain, than they will do on a soil that is less productive ; so that, strictly speaking, the intrinsic price of corn, when considered only in this point of view, will be different on almost every different field. How then, it may be asked, can its intrinsic value be ascertained over a vast tract of country, possessing a diversity of soils, of various degrees of fertility ; and how shall matters be so managed, as that all the rearers of it shall draw nearly the same price for their grain, and have nearly the same profits ?

All this is effected in the easiest and most natural manner, by means of rent. *Rent* is, in fact, nothing else than a simple and ingenious contrivance, for equalising the profits to be drawn from fields of different

degrees of fertility, and of local circumstance, which tend to augment or diminish the expence of culture. To make this plain, a few elucidations will be necessary.

In every country where men exist, there will be an effective demand for a certain quantity of grain : By *effective* demand, I mean a demand which must be supplied, that the inhabitants may all be properly subsisted. It is this demand, which in all cases regulates the price of grain ; for the quantity of grain required in this case must be had, and the price that is necessary for producing it, must be paid, whatever that may be. These calls, are of such a pressing nature, as not to be dispensed with.

For the sake of illustration, we shall, in the present case, suppose, that all the soils are arranged into classes according to their degrees of fertility ; which classes we shall at present denote by the letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G, &c. Let those comprehended in the class A, be the richest ; those in the class B, the second ; and so on, decreasing one degree in fertility for each class, as you advance towards G. Now, as the expence of cultivating the least fertile soil, is as great, or greater, than that of cultivating the most fertile field, it must happen, that if an equal quantity of grain, the produce of each class of fields, can be sold at the same price, the profit on cultivating the most fertile field will be greater, if no precaution were taken to guard against it, than could be obtained by cultivating those which are less fertile. And as this profit will continue to decrease, as sterility increases, it must at last happen, whatever be the price of corn, that the expence of cultivating some of the inferior classes of soils must equal, or exceed the value of the whole produce.

This being admitted, let us suppose that the effective demand was such as to raise the price of

grain, say to sixteen shillings *per* boll; and that the fields included in the class F, could just admit of defraying all expences, and no more, when corn was at that price; that those in the class E, could admit of being cultivated when the price was only fifteen shillings *per* boll; and that, in like manner, the classes D, C, B and A, consisted of fields which could have barely paid the expences of cultivation, respectively, when the prices were at fourteen, thirteen, twelve and eleven shillings *per* boll.

In these circumstances, it would happen, that those persons who possessed the fields in the class of F, would be able to afford no rent at all; nor could any rent be afforded in this case, for those of G, or other more sterile fields *for the purpose of rearing* corn: But it is also evident, that those who possessed fields in the class E, could not only pay the expence of cultivating them, but could also afford a rent to the proprietor, equal to one shilling for every boll of free produce; and in like manner, those who possessed the fields D, C, B, and A, would be able to afford a rent equal to two, three, four and five shillings *per* boll, of their free produce, respectively. Nor would the proprietors of these rich fields, find any difficulty in obtaining these rents; because farmers finding they could live equally well upon these soils, after paying such rents, as they could afford to do upon the fields, in the class F, without any rent at all, they would be equally willing to take these fields as the others. Thus it is that rent equalises the profit on different soils, in the most natural and easy manner, without tending in any degree to affect the price of grain.

Let us, however, once more suppose, that the whole produce of all the fields in the classes A, B, C, D, E, and F, were not sufficient to maintain the whole of the inhabitants of that district. In that case, one of two things must happen: Either the price of grain must rise

to seventeen shillings, so as to induce the owners of the field in the class G, to bring them into culture ; or a supply must be brought from some other place to answer that demand. In the first case, the fields G, being brought into culture, those in the class F would now be able to afford a rent equal to one shilling *per* boll of free produce ; and all the other classes could admit a similar rise. Here then we clearly perceive, that it is the price of grain that affects the rent, and not the rent that affects the price of the grain, as has been very often mistakenly alleged.

The natural consequence of such an increased demand for grain, and augmentation of price, is the converting of barren fields into corn lands, which never otherwise could have become such. A much greater quantity of grain is thus produced, than would otherwise have been possible ; and a more spirited agriculture everywhere takes place. By these exertions, the fields which originally ranked in the class G, pass into that of F, and by a gradual progression, they slide successively into the classes E, D, C, till at length they even reach the class A itself. In consequence of every one of these steps, a prodigious augmentation in the quantity of corn reared, is produced. The farmer is also enabled to sell it at a lower price than formerly, although he affords a higher rent ; so that every member of the community is benefited by the change.

It is beautiful to trace the operation of natural causes on the physical and political world, when they are suffered to operate freely : When population is augmented, and industry flourishing in a nation, we have seen, that it must of necessity occasion a greater demand for the products of agriculture than formerly. This gives a brisker sale, which augments the industry of the farmer ; more corn is thus produced. Some people would call this a creation, because it is

obtained where corn would never otherwise have been produced. This corn once raised, produces more manure, which, judiciously applied to the soil, gives additional produce. In this manner a beneficial progression is established, that admits of an extension, the limits of which no man can foresee. As the people increase, the means of supporting these people is augmented; so that a country, though it may be at the present moment, seemingly capable of maintaining no more than barely its present inhabitants, may yet, by a gradual increase, under a judicious government, have these augmented to perhaps a *hundred* times its present population; and yet be even more capable of furnishing subsistence to its inhabitants than it is at present. These particulars admit of the clearest proof, both by reasoning *a priori*, and by a fair induction of facts, which our limits alone at present forbid to enumerate. Nor is the converse of this proposition less demonstratively certain, *viz.* that by diminishing the number of inhabitants, and thus decreasing the demand for the produce of the fields, the quantity of that produce will be decreased,—the rents will of course fall,—the lands will slide back into the state that does not admit the expence of cultivation,—the total produce of all the fields, considered as an aggregate of grass and corn, will fall much short of what they formerly yielded*,—and the few inhabitants that remain, will find only a scanty subsistence, where a much more numerous people formerly enjoyed plenty. It is thus the people of Palestine, though not one-tenth of the number which once inhabited it in a state of abundance, now

* When land is suffered to run into grass after being cultivated, unless it be that of the very richest quality, it gradually produces less and less than at first, so as in time to afford scarce any food at all for domestic animals. This is a fact, that some inattentive observers will perhaps be disposed to controvert. I wish to God, Scotland were in that condition, as not to afford any proofs of it, which are at present but too numerous!

find a difficulty to pick up a scanty subsistence there. This, some persons may perhaps ascribe to the supernatural influence of divine malediction having dried up the sources of plenty there. To avoid arguing on this head, we need only turn our eyes to Spain, which three centuries ago, nourished four times, at least, the quantity of people it now contains. It could then afford abundance of food for all its people, and to spare: Its inhabitants now are frequently obliged to have recourse to foreign aid, to prevent them from starving. This phenomenon we are not to consider as in the smallest degree miraculous: It would have indeed been miraculous had it been otherwise.

I must not, however, conclude this paper, without taking notice of one particular, which was purposely kept out of sight not to embarrass the demonstration. In the foregoing observations, I have taken notice of land that might produce corn without affording any rent; but that, though a physical possibility, cannot practically happen. Land, in every case, while in pasture, can afford some rent; and when the pasture is rich, among a luxurious people, it can afford more rent, in many circumstances, than while in corn. This rent must always be deducted, therefore, whatever it be, before such land comes to the state in which our reasoning above is philosophically just.* If, therefore, the price of grain be unreasonably depressed by injudicious regulations, while the price of live stock increases, a wonderful diminution in the quantity of grain reared, may take place, so as to occasion phenomena, that may appear very inexplicable to short-sighted men, and occasion alarms that are altogether unfounded. The effects, however, of such

* This rent ought in fact to be accounted part of the expence of cultivating the soil, as it must be sunk when it is subjected to the plough.

regulations, are highly pernicious, because they stop improvements in their very origin. The actual quantity of vegetable production, whether for the food of man or beast, can only be augmented in any country by the culture of corn crops, in the first instance*. A barren heath, if left untouched by human culture, would continue a heath for ever. But by the industry of man, that heath may soon be converted into corn, and artificial grass, and all the variety of useful crops suited to the climate. It is by encouraging agriculture alone, therefore, taking that word in its strict and literal sense, "that ever two stalks of corn can be produced, or two blades of grass be made to grow, where one only grew before." Nor are its powers limited to the narrow sphere that Swift in this sentence assigned it; both grass and corn, and every other useful vegetable production, may be made to grow in abundance, not only where never one plant of these did grow; but even where never one of them would have grown, without the fostering aid of man.

All is the gift of industry.

What have those to answer for, who by their weak and foolish regulations, tie up the hands of the industrious man, and oblige him to languish in want, when, but for these regulations, they might had abundance! Where is the man who will weed out all such pernicious statutes from the British code! He would have many erasures to make; his task would be more la-

* I am not insensible of the improvements that may be made, by spreading calcareous manures in great quantities upon heath; but because of the immense quantity of calcareous manure required for this mode of improvement, it can, in few cases, be procured; so that it may be considered only as a partial exception to a very general rule.

The same thing may be said, of the substantial improvements that in some cases may be made by watering. In both cases, the *quantum* of improvement, where the manures are limited, may be greatly augmented, by the aid of judicious culture.

borious than that of Hercules, but it would be more beneficial also.
